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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MASS](#) [ETTC](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EU/CHINA ARMS: SLOWING THE RUSH TO THE SUMMIT

REF: A. BERLIN 3497

- [1](#)B. USEU BRUSSELS 4376
- [1](#)C. THE HAGUE 2605
- [1](#)D. LONDON 7653
- [1](#)E. PARIS 7470
- [1](#)F. USEU BRUSSELS 2896
- [1](#)G. USEU BRUSSELS 3435
- [1](#)H. USEU BRUSSELS 3421
- [1](#)I. STATE 222102

Classified By: USEU Poloff Van Reidhead for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: US approaches to EU member states have slowed the rush to end the arms embargo before the December 8 summit with China. Nevertheless, following the October 11 GAERC discussion of China, EU Member States appear to be gearing up to signal to China at the summit that they have agreed in principle to lift the EU arms embargo, but will need more time to iron out the details. Negotiations on changes to the EU's Code of Conduct appear stalled, and could delay EU readiness to move ahead. We have slowed this train, but not derailed it. To do so will require a more vibrant public debate, building on coverage inaugurated by PM P/DAS Greg Suchan in his visit to Brussels October 7. A public diplomacy campaign that energizes natural allies in European parliaments, NGOs and among commentators could create enough bottom-up political pressure to prevent the EU from making any hasty commitments at the EU-China summit. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Thanks in large part to the approaches made by US embassies in member state capitals, the October 11 GAERC held inconclusive discussions on ending the China arms embargo. According to our discussions here, the EU is not yet prepared to lift its arms embargo on China, but the trend among Member States continues to move in that direction. Brussels-based EU diplomats understood that the mandate that emerged from the GAERC is to re-double their efforts to reform the Code of Conduct and finalize discussions on a "Toolbox" of measures for post-embargo states. But as ref (C) makes clear and other reporting suggests, there is no committed opposition within the EU to lifting the embargo. It appears less likely than ever that individual Member States will stand up and challenge the widespread assumption that the embargo should, at least in principle, be lifted. FM Straw's post-GAERC statement to the press -- "We are not in any sense against lifting the embargo, but it has got to be done in a proper and sensible manner..." -- should serve as notice that the EU is moving beyond "if" and is now discussing the when and how of lifting the embargo.

[1](#)3. (C) While EU governments may have agreed tacitly that the embargo should in principle be lifted, time will still be needed to work out a formula that keeps all Member States on board. The outlines of that formula have been clear since July: strengthening the Code of Conduct on arms sales (ref. G); creating a "Toolbox" to monitor transfers to post-embargo countries (ref. H); issuing a political declaration stating the EU's intent to remain vigilant on arms sales to China; and perhaps getting token progress from China on human rights.

[1](#)4. (C) Differing Member State views on each of these elements are serious, but not insurmountable. We were told by an informed Council contact, for example, that the Code of Conduct and Toolbox "could be agreed tomorrow" if the French removed their objections to draft provisions calling for a higher degree of transparency and regularity in Member State arms licensing consultations. Discussions on strengthening the Code of Conduct are also currently stalemated over whether to make it legally binding; Dutch Presidency contacts suggest the final decision on this will be political, not technical. It is possible, but not likely, that the EU will be able to iron out all these differences in time for a full lifting of the embargo prior to the December 8 EU-China summit. The most likely scenario, however, would be for the EU to achieve sufficient consensus over the next two months to go to the summit and confidently signal to China that the end of the embargo is near; that it will be lifted as soon as Member States finish ironing out the "modalities." Beijing might even help the process along by sending some positive signals, whether genuine or not, on human rights, or by intimating that the summit itself could be endangered by a lack of EU progress. In other words, even though the EU does not appear likely to lift the embargo by December 8, it might still be able to make a commitment to China that we and other

concerned parties would be unable to walk back later.

15. (C) The EU still has several opportunities to make progress on the issue before the EU-China summit. Foreign Ministers will meet again at the November 2 and November 22 GAERCs (joined by Defense Ministers at the latter), and Heads of Government will gather for a summit on November 5. At each of these meetings, we should expect those pushing for a rapid lifting of the embargo to aggressively pursue their agenda, especially after Chirac's performance in China last week. Whether a formal agenda item or just the topic of debate on the margins, the China embargo will be a theme in each of these meetings. The goal of the pro-lift camp will be to achieve sufficient consensus to go to the EU-China summit with a solid pledge to lift the embargo in the very near future. Under these circumstances, our goal should be to make that a politically unpalatable thing to do.

16. (C) Changing the political calculus of EU governments that have so far acquiesced to pro-lift arguments will require continuing our diplomatic efforts while raising the level of our public outreach (ref. F). PM P/DAS Greg Suchan's on-the-record public appearances in Brussels on October 7 (ref. B) were an excellent start. His remarks helped launch a public debate in Europe that until now had been conspicuously absent. Numerous commentators, NGOs and Parliamentarians from across Europe have begun weighing in with compelling arguments that lifting the embargo would be foolish on both strategic and human rights grounds. In an editorial following Suchan's visit, the influential Financial Times even acknowledged, "Washington is on solid ground on this matter of international security." We have only seen one commentary in the last week defending the pro-lift argument, and that was in a low circulation weekly that caters almost exclusively to EU bureaucrats.

17. (C) On-the-record public outreach by US officials helps get out our key message concerning the embargo. Far more effective, however, is public political debate in EU member states. To the extent possible, our public diplomacy efforts should aim to encourage influential NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to speak out. (For a European audience, the presence of Amnesty International's EU director alongside P/DAS Suchan at a press event on October 7 added tremendous credibility to our message.) Likewise, European parliaments should be encouraged to take a stand, holding hearings on the issue and clarifying their concerns. Liberal MEP Graham Watson is initiating a debate in the European parliament in mid-November (date tbd). Similar efforts in member state capitals can help raise the ante as foreign ministers and heads of government face this issue, and should be encouraged.

Schnabel